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Johnson on Killing of J.F.K.

WASHINGTON, April 16 (AP) — The controversy over whether the same bullet struck President John F. Kennedy and Gov. John B. Connally of Texas began immediately after the assassination. President Lyndon B. Johnson did not believe that one bullet struck the two officials, according to tapes released on Friday by the National Archives and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin, Tex.

Connally was wounded when Kennedy was slain in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

Senator Richard B. Russell, Democrat of Georgia and a member of the commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren that investigated the assassination, called Johnson on Sept. 18, 1964, to discuss the commission's progress. Russell said the report would note disagreement on the panel over whether Connally had been struck by a bullet that had already hit Kennedy or by a separate one.

"Well, what difference does it make which bullet got Connally?" Johnson asked.

"Well, it don't make much difference," Russell replied. "But the commission believes that the same bullet that hit Kennedy hit Connally. Well, I don't believe it."

"I don't either," Johnson said.

How Many Shots?

Investigators agreed that three shots were fired, but arguments have persisted over whether the same bullet could have passed through Kennedy's upper back and then struck Connally. The two men were hit at nearly the same instant. Many people who see a conspiracy contend that if the same bullet could not have wounded both men, there had to have been a second bullet, and therefore a second gunman.

The Warren Commission said Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman.

When Connally died last summer, researchers asked that the bullet fragments still in his body be recovered to resolve the issue, but his family rejected the request.

Russell seemed to have no problem believing that Oswald fired separate shots that hit Kennedy and Connally.

"Of course, if the fellow was accurate enough to hit Kennedy in the neck with one shot and knock his head off with the next, when he was leaning up against his wife's head, and not even wound her, why, he didn't miss completely with that third shot," Russell told Johnson.

Some commission members theorized that the third shot "not only missed the whole automobile, but he missed the street," the Senator said.

"A man a good enough shot to put two bullets right in Kennedy, he didn't miss that whole automobile," he added.

"What's the whole thing?" Johnson asked. "What does it say? Oswald did it? He did it for any reason?"

"Well, it says he was a generally misanthropic fellow," Russell responded. "He had never been satisfied with where he was on earth, and he had a desire to have his name in history."

Johnson told the Senate majority leader, Mike Mansfield, Democrat of Montana, that the critics did not "quite find the motive yet this fellow had to want to kill him."

"He was going back and forth to Russia," Johnson said. "He was messing around in Mexico with the Cubans."

The tapes reviewed in Austin showed that Connally called Johnson on March 2, 1967, to discuss reports that Cuba had been involved in the Kennedy assassination. In other phone conversations Johnson told aides to keep up with the inquiry into the slaying by the New Orleans District Attorney, Jim Garrison. Garrison's theories and writings about the assassination formed the basis for the 1991 movie "J. F. K." by Oliver Stone.